



To: Committee on Environment, Connecticut General Assembly

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Written testimony RE:

Raised Bill No. 790, "An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Invasive Plant Council"

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and other members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Mary Musgrave, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Bill No. 790, "An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Invasive Plant Council." My purpose today is to explain the reasons the Connecticut Invasive Plants Council recommends adoption of this bill and to encourage your support of the language within it.

The Invasive Plants Council was established and operates pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 22a-381 through 22a-381d and has the following responsibilities: developing and conducting initiatives to educate the public about the problems created by invasive plants in lakes, forests and other natural habitats; publishing and updating a list of invasive or potentially invasive plants; and supporting state agencies in conducting research into invasive plant control, including the development of new non-invasive plant varieties and methods for controlling existing species.

As Chairman of the Invasive Plants Council I represent 9 appointed members who work in the government, the nursery industry, and environmental groups. This group has been meeting since 2003 and has issued six annual reports on its activities, including recommendations that have arisen out of its deliberations. Much of the time spent by the Council has been devoted to discussing technical changes needed in the current laws and the need to secure financial support to fund a program to manage aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants and to educate the public. In the 2007 state budget, an allocation of \$500,000 for each of two years was provided to support these activities. The Council thanks Senator Andrew Roraback and Representative Clark Chapin for introducing bills and Representative Richard Roy and the members of the Committee for their support of the legislation. This year's bill, no. 790, is critical because it contains the legislative technical changes that the Council has been recommending since 2004.

Council members are eager to see these technical changes made to the legislation. The municipal prohibition on regulating the sale or purchase of invasive plants (section 3d) is very important because the authority for regulating invasive plants should remain with the state. Connecticut's ability to combat the invasive plant problem will be fractured if municipalities make their own regulations regarding problem plants.

The bill defines the roles of the two regulatory agencies involved (the Director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, and the Commissioner of Agriculture), which will clarify procedures regarding inspection and enforcement. Further, it modifies the language to make legal the education- and research-related movement of invasive plants. This change is important for continued progress on the public awareness front, and to prevent restriction of research efforts at our Universities and Experiment Stations. The bill also proposes language that provides for legal transport and disposal of invasive plant materials resulting from control projects. This has been a pressing issue ever since the original legislation was passed.

The bill removes water lettuce from the list of banned invasives, which is appropriate because the plant's sensitivity to cold temperature makes it unable to become a problem in our ecosystems, and plantmen in the state should not be prohibited from distributing it. Section 3b of the bill is an important addition because it specifies that reproductive parts of the regulated plants are included in the prohibitions. For example, because of this clarifying language, sales of bittersweet wreathes will become illegal when this bill is passed. Many environmentalists worry that discarded wreathes become a seed source that then leads to new invasions by the oriental bittersweet vine.

I am one of several University of Connecticut faculty members affiliated with the New England Invasive Plant Center, a multi-state, interdisciplinary initiative supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The University of Connecticut serves as the lead institution for the Center, and together with colleagues at the University of Maine, our goals are to conduct research and public outreach to address problems caused by invasive plants that are economically and environmentally damaging to New England and the nation. The language changes in Bill 790 will make our jobs of outreach and research easier to accomplish.

I urge you to support Bill No. 760, "An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Invasive Plant Council." The sooner we make the technical changes needed in the legislation, the sooner the people of Connecticut will recognize that they now have a comprehensive plan to address the issue of invasive plants in our state, and the considerable talents and resources that are available to combat this problem can be brought together in the most effective manner.

Supporting this bill will give more people the opportunity to learn about invasives, how they threaten our natural areas, and how they can be controlled with best management practices for environmental stewardship. Taking action now will help protect Connecticut's environment in the future.

I would like to thank the Environment Committee for your continued interest in invasive plants as one of many important environmental concerns, and for the opportunity to submit this testimony to you.